

# City and Town

Navjeet K. Bal, Commissioner • Robert G. Nunes, Deputy Commissioner & Director of Municipal Affairs



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## Gateway Expands to All Cities, Towns and Districts for Submissions Online

David Davies, Director, Information Technology

The Division of Local Services' Gateway is a set of online modules that allow authorized local officials to log in, enter, analyze, sign and submit information to the Department of Revenue (DOR). Municipal officials with reliable Internet connections can communicate directly with DOR's database and DLS' internal workflow and activity tracking systems. This means greater efficiency and accountability as DLS aims to make complex review and approval processes faster and more transparent for thousands of local officials.

After successful pilot testing of tax rate setting and Schedule A submissions in 17 communities over the last 12 months, assessors, accountants, and other local officials will use DLS Gateway as the preferred method for submitting local information, running analytical reports, and checking status for all municipalities and districts beginning in fiscal year 2009. Assessors in most communities got a head start last spring by using Gateway to submit real estate sales information online for computation of Equalized Assessed Valuations (EQV).

For municipal departments with fast and reliable Internet access, pilot testing showed that officials preferred online submissions because:

- They knew whether DLS had the latest submitted information;
- Errors were easy to correct;

- Analytical and statistical reports used by DLS analysts were now available for community use before signing and submitting data; and
- DLS Gateway is easy to use, requiring no special training.



Successful expansion to all municipalities and districts will require local participation in managing who wants to use the system and setting appropriate permissions. For example, many local finance officials contribute to assembling the correct information and making the decisions that result in a community's tax rate submission. Many officials, therefore, may need permission to enter information and sign forms, but only one official should have the ability to determine that the bottom line totals and percentages derived from all the forms are correct and ready for submission. Usually that person is the chief assessing officer, and DLS has set permissions accordingly based on the best information available. Realities in your community may call for a different person, in which case the local account administrator in your locality can make the necessary changes.

Please consider the environment before printing this newsletter.



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### DLS Commentary

On July 13, Governor Deval Patrick signed the FY2009 budget, which includes an increase of \$223.2 million or 5.99 percent in Chapter 70 aid.

Besides increases in Chapter 70 aid, the budget provides increases of \$2.8 million for Regional School Transportation, \$5.9 million more in Charter School Tuition reimbursements, \$2.8 million more for Police Career Incentive aid, \$5.4 million more in Veterans Benefits, and an additional \$2 million for the PILOT program.

Despite this, the outlook for the new fiscal year warrants fiscal caution for cities and towns. As DOR Commissioner Navjeet K. Bal noted in her July 16 announcement of FY2008 year end revenues, the Commonwealth's tax collections for FY2008 were more than \$1 billion higher than those of a year ago. But the elements that drove those collections — income tax paid on capital gains, dividends and interest, settlement of some large tax lawsuits and strong withholding tax collections, "will likely not occur again in FY2009," warned Bal.

Still awaiting final legislative action in a supplemental budget are: a proposal to allow communities to borrow for feasibility studies now required as part of the SBA program; an additional \$4 million in local funding for snow and ice removal; and \$4.7 million to fund shortfall in the FY08 Charter Tuition reimbursements.

Finally, we'd like to welcome Pam Kocher, formerly of the MMA, to the administration as ANF's new director of local policy! Please read her profile on page 11 to learn more.

*Robert G. Nunes*

**Robert G. Nunes**  
Deputy Commissioner &  
Director of Municipal Affairs

## Best Practices

# The 411 on 311

**Patricia Vinchesi, Deputy Director, Springfield Finance Control Board**

This fall, the City of **Springfield** is scheduled to implement a 311 Call Center operation, which will provide its 151,000 citizens a common access point for city services and information by voice, e-mail or the Internet.

Through 311, residents gain equal access to government, regardless of their individual familiarity with city operations, and receive faster service from trained call center professionals. Customer inquiries are tracked through a ticketing process to ensure a level of accountability and quality control.

In 1997, the Federal Communications Commission reserved the number "311" nationwide for non-emergency access to local government services in the United States, thus offering a "one-stop shopping" center for access to city services and information with an easy-to-remember telephone number.

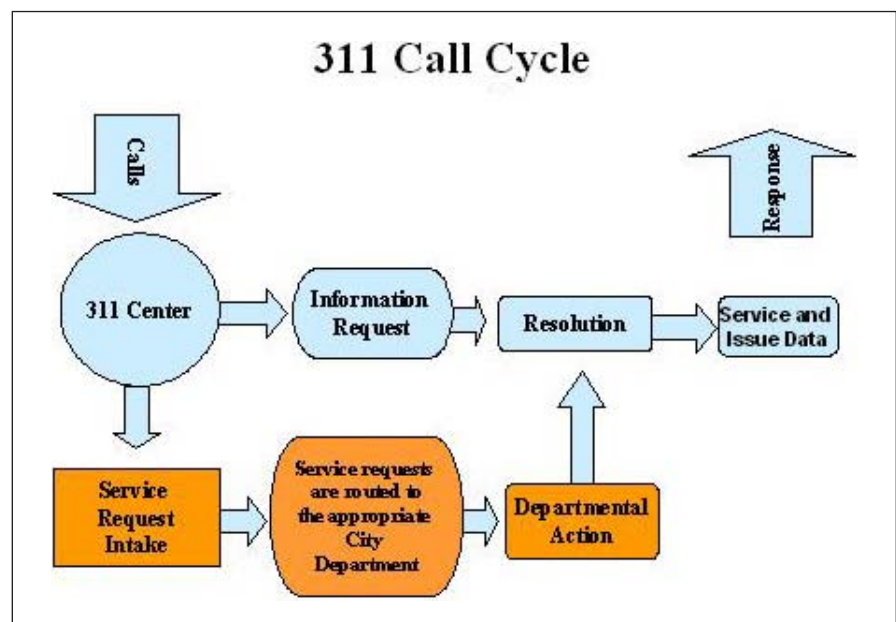
Springfield's phased rollout of 311 will mark the completion of many months of development and planning. The primary goal is to improve service delivery and timely response to citizens who

need information or have a complaint. More than 60 cities in the United States currently use 311. The City of **Somerville** has been a leader in this area and was most helpful to the City of Springfield as it moved forward to determine if 311 would be the right fit for the community. Other municipalities in the Northeast using 311 include Hartford and Danbury in Connecticut, and Buffalo and Rochester in New York.

The type of knowledge-based data center created through 311 affords numerous economies of scale for service delivery or what is more commonly referred to as Citizen Relationship Management (CRM). CRM is a broad term that involves various technologies customized to fit the needs of particular applications. In the case of local governments, CRM's key benefit is the accountability it provides in being responsive to concerns in the community.

The 311 software allows for the integration of work order systems with customer service requests in each depart-

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## Legal

# Taxation of Leased Public Land

James Crowley, Esq., Municipal Law Bureau

In two recent decisions the Appellate Tax Board (ATB) addressed the assessment of publicly owned real property under M.G.L. Ch. 59 § 2B. The first case concerned the taxation of private aircraft hangars at a municipal airport. The second decision pertained to the assessment of a hydroelectric facility for land under the Connecticut River, based on the company's water rights.

M.G.L. Ch. 59 § 2B provides in pertinent part that where real property, owned by the commonwealth or a municipality, is used in connection with a business conducted for profit or leased or occupied for non-public purposes, it may be valued, classified, assessed and taxed annually as of January 1 to the user, lessee or occupant in the same manner as if owned in fee. This statute also states that no tax assessed under § 2B shall be a lien on the property, and payment of any tax may not be enforced by a sale or taking of the property. Under common law, governmentally owned property would be tax exempt. The rationale for enactment of M.G.L. Ch. 59 § 2B was to permit the assessment of taxes on ordinarily tax exempt governmental property to those persons or entities using or occupying the property for their own benefit rather than for a public purpose.

In *Smith v. Assessors of Fitchburg*, docket # F277870, (January 2008), the ATB upheld the assessment of the privately owned hangars constructed on city owned land at the Fitchburg Municipal Airport. The taxpayers had argued that the aircraft hangars were exempt from taxation under M.G.L. Ch. 59 § 2B, since the statute, by its terms, exempted from tax any use, lease or occupancy, "reasonably necessary to the public purpose of a public airport." According to the ATB, the hangars did not serve a public purpose since they were held or rented by private individuals for

the storage of their private aircraft. Access to the locked hangars was strictly regulated and the general public could not use them. In their oral and written argument, the taxpayers also failed to demonstrate that the private use of the hangars benefited the city in some way, such as, by reducing traffic in the City of Fitchburg. In addition, the ATB observed that the hangars, although admittedly convenient for the private owners, could not be seen as reasonably necessary to the public purpose of the airport. The ATB wrote that this situation differed dramatically from that presented in *MCC Management Group,*

**The right of way increases the homeowner's property value since it permits access and development of the land, but the right of way itself is not separately assessed.**

*Inc. v. Assessors of New Bedford* where the ATB in the year 2000 dismissed a tax under M.G.L. Ch. 59 § 2B on a privately managed public skating rink. Unlike the scenario with the hangars, the ATB had ruled that the skating rink, which was open to the general public for a modest admission charge, was reasonably necessary to the public purpose of a park.

In our view, the decision in *Smith* is consistent with the Division of Local Service's opinion letters. We have concluded, however, that certain leases would be characterized as reasonably necessary to the operation of a public airport and not taxable to the lessee under M.G.L. Ch. 59 § 2B. Such non-taxable leases would include property

leased by private commercial airlines for passenger ticketing, waiting areas, places for baggage and sites for the storage and maintenance of aircraft.

The second ATB case concerned the assessment of the Northfield Mountain Hydroelectric Facility by the towns of **Northfield** and **Erving**. The decision was *Northeast Generation Co. v. Assessors of Northfield*, docket # F287573 and *Northeast Generation Co. v. Assessors of Erving*, docket # F287884, (April 2008). A question arose concerning the allocation of value of the pump storage plant between the two towns. The total fair market value of the facility was in excess of \$500,000,000. The Northfield assessors, however, maintained that their town's portion of the valuation should include the land under the Connecticut River. The Northfield assessors contended that the facility leased, occupied or used the riverbed of a navigable river, held in trust by the commonwealth, for its for-profit business purposes. The ATB disagreed. Taxation would be entirely permissible under M.G.L. Ch. 59 § 2B if the facility was actually using, occupying or leasing the land in the riverbed. However, the facility did not possess that real estate. According to the ATB, the facility merely had the right to draw water from the river and discharge it back into the river. Any water rights held by the facility were appurtenant to the land on which the plant was located, and were not separately assessable by the Northfield assessors. Relying on prior court decisions, the ATB held that Northfield improperly assessed a tax under M.G.L. Ch. 59 § 2B on the facility for its water rights. The ATB therefore granted a partial abatement to reduce Northfield's percentage portion of the total plant assessment.

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## Focus on Municipal Finance

# Fiscal 2008 Average Single-Family Tax Bills and Assessed Values

Amy Januskiewicz and Terry Williams, Field Representatives, Bureau of Accounts

Introduction & Highlight by Jared Curtis, Analyst, Local Aid/Databank

Did you know that the state average single-family tax bill has increased every year since fiscal year 1990? Unfortunately, that has not been the case for the state average value of a single-family home. During the early 1990's and again in FY2008, the average value decreased. During times of economic downturn (1992 to 1994) the average value dropped over \$13,000. The average value saw — for the first time in a decade — a slight decrease again in FY2008. Even though the values decreased in FY08, between FY1999 and FY2008 the average value has actually increased by 132.6 percent; while, during the same time period the average tax bill has increased 60.8 percent.

This article reviews FY2008 single-family tax bills and property values across the commonwealth. As in previous years, this article ranks communities statewide. It also highlights some major trends and discusses the impact on single-family tax bills. The analysis is based primarily on FY08 data as reported by local assessors to the Department of Revenue's Division of Local Services (DLS).

Average single-family property tax bills are calculated by summing the assessed value of all single-family parcels in each community, then dividing this total by the number of parcels resulting in the average single-family property value. This average value is then divided by one thousand (since tax rates are per \$1,000 of assessed property value) and multiplied by the residential tax rate.

The 14 cities and towns that have adopted a residential exemption are excluded from this analysis because they do not submit sufficiently detailed data to DLS to determine their average

tax bills. Four communities (**Cumington, Gosnold, Middlefield and Richmond**) had not set rates in time for this publication, and were, therefore, also excluded from this analysis.

## Statewide Trends

### Tax Bills

As mentioned above, over each of the past 10 years (FY1999–FY2008), the average tax bill has increased in both actual and inflation adjusted dollars. The smallest percentage increase over the last decade occurred in FY2008 when tax bills increased by \$149, or 3.76 percent, to \$4,111. The percentage increase of the average tax bill over the past decade ranged from the aforementioned 2008 recent low of a 3.76 percent increase to 2002's high of a 6.7 percent increase. The cumulative percentage increase over this period is 60.8 percent; in other words, the average homeowner is paying property tax bills 60.8 percent higher than ten years ago. However, using the implicit price deflator for state and local government services the constant dollar increases over the same period was only 9.31 percent, indicating that tax bills are barely keeping up with the cost of services. In fact, tax bills have failed to keep pace with inflation using this measure in each of the last four years.

### Tax Rates

As the rate at which tax bills increased fluctuated, the average tax rate steadily decreased from a high of \$14.73 per \$1,000 in 1999 to a low of \$9.74 per \$1,000 in 2007 due to constant (although not at a steady rate) increases in property values. However, as the market began to sink, tax rates increased again in 2008 to \$10.00 per \$1,000.

## Property Values

In addition to the first increase in the average tax rate in a decade, FY2008 also ushered in a dramatic switch in assessed values across the state. Values had reached double-digit percentage increases every year between 2001 and 2005. The highest of these value increases was in FY2005 when the average value increased from \$307,361 to \$352,820; although the greatest percentage increase, 15.4 percent, was from 2003–2004. This steady growth in values had slowed at times during the previous nine-year period, but in FY2008, for the first time in a decade, the state's average value actually showed a net decrease of .073 percent. This drop decreased the average value from \$406,673 in 2007 to \$403,695 in 2008. Over the course of just three years, from FY2005 to FY2008 the rate at which values had been increasing slipped from 14.79 percent (FY2005) to 9.26 percent (FY2006) to 5.49 percent (FY2007) down to negative .073 percent, a striking drop of approximately five percent each year.

Despite the fact that FY2008 brought more increases in tax bills, the first increase to the average tax rate in ten years, and the first drop in the average value in a decade, it should be noted, that the average single-family property value in FY2008 is more than double what it was in FY1999: in 1999 it was \$173,576 and in 2008 it is \$403,695, showing the 132.6 percent increase in value previously mentioned.

As the value of residential property has climbed, a greater portion of the tax burden has gradually shifted to the residential class of property owners throughout

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## FY2007 and FY2008 Average Single-Family Tax Bills and Assessed Values

Municipality	FY07 avg. value	FY08 avg. value	Pct. change value	FY07 tax bill	FY08 tax bill	Pct. change bill	FY08 bi-to rank*	FY08 tax rate	Municipality	FY07 avg. value	FY08 avg. value	Pct. change value	FY07 tax bill	FY08 tax bill	Pct. change bill	FY08 bi-to rank*	FY08 tax rate
Abington	362,350	347,780	-4.02	3,913	3,874	-1.00	133	11.14	Chesterfield	226,893	227,796	0.40	2,995	3,066	2.37	222	13.46
Acton	542,140	523,109	-3.51	7,926	8,051	1.58	15	15.39	Chicopee	177,921	193,684	8.86	2,270	2,394	5.46	302	12.36
Acushnet	371,284	320,098	0.89	2,916	2,961	1.54	237	9.25	Chilmark	1,738,110	1,733,060	-0.29	3,250	3,397	4.52	177	1.96
Adams	133,618	140,669	5.28	2,032	2,113	3.99	312	15.02	Clarksburg	166,141	167,168	0.62	1,533	1,608	4.89	326	9.62
Agawam	218,981	229,150	4.64	2,568	2,690	3.94	265	11.74	Clinton	257,984	259,915	0.75	2,830	2,947	4.13	239	11.34
Afford	526,366	653,984	24.24	2,632	2,681	1.86	267	4.10	Cohasset	825,126	848,875	2.88	8,664	8,998	3.86	10	10.60
Amesbury	346,423	344,464	-0.59	4,822	5,029	4.29	63	14.60	Corlain	177,534	178,401	0.49	9,740	10,125	3.95	5	10.72
Amherst	330,926	332,528	0.48	5,189	5,327	2.66	57	16.02	Concord	922,372	944,487	2.40	3,882	3,692	-4.89	146	12.00
Andover	591,798	581,568	-1.73	6,658	6,799	2.12	32	11.69	Conway	294,058	307,628	4.61	2,292				
Aquinnah	991,101	1,287,044	29.86	3,994	4,183	4.73	109	3.25	Cummington	213,029							
Arlington	486,431	475,290	-2.29	5,326	5,442	2.18	53	11.45	Dartmouth	212,119	213,538	0.67	3,006	3,152	4.86	205	14.76
Ashburnham	246,341	246,979	0.26	3,202	3,193	-0.28	198	12.93	Danvers	432,878	408,848	-6.01	4,034	4,231	4.88	104	10.40
Ashby	264,563	263,798	-0.29	3,095	3,042	-1.71	227	11.53	Dedham	416,488	420,988	1.08	2,832	2,707	-4.41	260	6.43
Ashfield	236,988	245,250	3.49	2,751	3,061	11.27	224	12.48	Dedham	446,685	417,013	-6.64	4,882	5,025	2.93	64	12.05
Ashland	411,091	413,165	0.50	5,180	5,338	3.05	56	12.92	Deerfield	278,303	284,075	2.07	3,070	3,133	2.05	213	11.03
Athol	189,539	187,362	-1.15	1,914	1,954	2.09	109	10.43	Dennis	450,923	452,165	0.28	1,884	1,967	3.85	318	4.35
Attleboro	308,738	317,375	2.80	2,985	2,996	0.37	235	9.44	Dighton	350,096	335,997	-4.02	3,273	3,420	4.49	172	10.18
Auburn	268,318	267,350	-0.38	2,793	2,917	4.44	241	10.91	Douglas	317,409	311,745	-1.78	3,263	3,152	-3.40	206	10.11
Avon	328,407	322,338	-1.85	3,159	3,149	-0.32	208	9.77	Dover	1,125,323	1,113,869	-1.02	10,353	10,860	4.90	4	9.75
Ayer	296,635	303,452	2.30	2,830	2,986	5.51	236	9.84	Dracut	318,811	303,879	-4.68	3,092	3,206	3.69	197	10.55
Barnstable *	231,366	240,639	4.01	2,383	2,507	5.20	291	10.42	Dudley	262,930	272,456	3.62	2,027	2,073	2.27	315	7.61
Barre	219,257	234,344	6.88	1,820	1,901	4.45	321	8.11	Dunstable	446,859	445,111	2.74	5,058	5,344	5.65	55	11.64
Becket	528,677	524,795	1.16	5,969	6,086	1.96	41	11.38	Duxbury	649,099	641,332	-1.20	6,582	6,805	3.39	31	10.61
Bedford	260,275	265,590	2.04	3,443	3,570	3.69	157	13.44	E. Bridgewater	357,873	355,020	-0.80	3,715	3,824	2.93	140	10.77
Belchertown	320,955	311,780	-2.86	2,953	3,040	2.95	228	9.75	E. Brookfield	264,534	260,791	-1.41	2,241	2,757	23.03	254	10.57
Bellingham	803,440	767,676	-4.45	8,283	8,652	4.45	12	11.27	E. Longmeadow	256,080	267,462	4.44	4,154	4,295	3.39	100	16.06
Belmont	392,919	377,209	-4.00	3,772	3,904	3.50	129	10.35	Eastham	512,384	506,193	-1.21	2,362	2,571	8.85	282	5.08
Berkley	396,527	377,584	-2.31	2,972	2,851	-4.07	246	7.55	Easthampton	231,245	232,079	0.36	2,576	2,657	3.14	270	11.45
Berlin	443,902	446,317	0.54	4,865	4,999	2.75	66	11.20	Easton	442,269	428,317	-3.37	4,785	4,921	2.84	70	11.49
Bernardston	220,798	223,487	1.22	3,499	3,323	8.99	183	14.87	Edgartown	1,102,245	1,211,784	9.94	3,141	3,308	5.32	184	2.73
Beverly	454,936	456,848	0.42	4,613	4,751	2.99	79	10.40	Egmont	419,083	467,183	11.48	2,640	2,719	2.99	256	5.82
BillERICA	349,998	351,433	0.41	3,780	3,873	2.46	134	11.02	Erving	177,653	184,924	4.09	1,203	1,235	2.66	330	6.68
Blackstone	313,039	305,575	-2.38	3,409	3,484	2.20	166	11.40	Essex	517,232	515,214	-0.39	5,198	5,539	6.56	51	10.75
Blandford	674,891	677,925	0.45	7,059	7,423	5.16	24	10.95	Everett *	340,081			2,836				
Bolton	516,061	508,183	-1.53	7,256	7,648	5.40	22	15.05	Fairhaven	291,239	301,500	3.52	2,307	2,370	2.73	304	7.86
Boston *	474,404	481,988	1.60	3,046	3,152	3.48	204	6.54	Fall River	267,099	269,589	0.93	1,918	2,068	7.82	316	7.67
Bourne	554,010	565,638	2.10	7,684	7,998	4.09	16	14.14	Falmouth	548,225	542,292	-1.08	2,878	3,064	6.46	223	5.65
Boxborough	674,891	677,925	0.45	7,059	7,423	5.16	24	10.95	Fitchburg	218,604	219,934	0.61	2,523	2,584	2.42	280	11.75
Boylston	418,554	420,477	0.46	4,717	4,810	1.97	77	11.44	Florida	142,060	154,680	8.88	1,014	1,104	8.88	331	7.14
Brantree	400,772	394,784	-1.49	3,262	3,423	4.94	171	8.67	Foxborough	433,042	415,383	-4.08	4,296	4,424	2.98	96	10.65
Brewster	514,933	514,041	-0.17	2,817	2,853	1.28	245	5.55	Frammingham	385,176	384,728	-0.12	4,564	4,821	5.63	76	12.53
Bridgewater	392,919	377,209	-4.00	3,772	3,904	3.50	129	10.35	Franklin	437,052	411,508	-5.84	3,872	4,210	8.73	107	10.23
Brimfield	245,152	256,599	4.52	2,927	3,038	3.79	229	11.84	Freetown	366,928	348,567	-5.00	3,049	3,113	2.10	215	8.93
Brockton	291,162	278,291	-4.42	2,734	2,672	-2.27	268	9.60	Gardner	216,843	211,954	-2.25	2,524	2,567	1.70	283	12.11
Brookfield	247,392	249,976	1.04	3,013	3,200	6.21	198	12.80	Georgetown	440,474	442,829	0.53	3,966	4,118	3.31	116	9.30
Brookline *	212,227	213,640	0.67	2,761	2,846	3.08	247	13.32	Gill	175,805	212,500	20.87	2,380	2,433	2.23	298	11.45
Buckland	421,178	406,582	-3.47	3,675	3,903	0.72	130	9.60	Gloucester	524,446	510,540	-2.65	4,515	4,646	2.90	86	9.10
Burlington	507,748	488,856	-3.72	4,509	4,566	1.26	90	9.34	Goshen	195,572	195,601	0.01	2,511	2,596	3.39	279	13.27
Canton	822,143	825,035	0.35	9,833	10,610	7.90	5	12.86	Gosnold	954,887			1,881				
Carlele	398,813	325,343	-3.98	3,734	3,686	-1.29	147	11.33	Granton	403,979	390,324	-3.38	3,854	3,923	1.79	127	10.05
Charlton	131,334	199,252	4.14	3,105	2,923	-5.86	240	14.67	Granby	248,923	251,406	1.00	3,037	3,160	4.05	203	12.57
Chatham	893,429	875,403		3,118	3,213		196	3.67	Granville	232,840	264,416	13.56	2,470	2,961	19.88	238	11.20
Chatham	396,327	378,123	-4.59	4,966	5,105	2.80	62	13.50	Gr. Barrington	346,358	378,812	9.37	3,948	4,273	8.23	103	11.88
Chelsea *	203,303	203,031	-0.13	1,659	1,679	1.21	324	8.27	Greenfield	186,528	194,858	4.47	3,190	3,289	3.10	188	16.28
Cheshire	157,671	173,109	9.79	2,624	2,844	8.38	249	16.43	Groton	431,384	441,842	2.42	5,940	6,128	3.16	38	13.87
Chester									Groveland	396,239	398,533	0.58	3,871	4,037	4.29	122	10.13
									Hadley	285,871	300,346	7.16	2,607	2,708	3.87	259	8.84
									Halifax	351,558	330,980	-5.85	4,141	4,293	3.67	102	12.97
									Hamilton	544,434	538,850	-1.03	6,849	7,215	5.34	28	13.39
									Hampden	261,775	297,470	13.64	3,853	4,001	3.84	124	13.45

Municipality	FY07 avg. value	FY08 avg. value	Pct. change value	FY07 tax bill	FY08 tax bill	Pct. change tax bill	FY07 hi-lo rank <sup>1</sup>	FY08 hi-lo rank <sup>1</sup>	FY07 tax rate	FY08 tax rate
Methuen	312,890	314,049	0.37	3,019	3,219	6.62	195	10.25	15.5	10.10
Middleborough	347,432	326,403	-6.05	3,224	3,297	2.26	185	10.10	15.5	10.10
Middlefield	187,054	175,555	-6.95	2,125	2,125	0.00	54	9.69	15.5	9.69
Middleton	527,956	552,873	4.72	5,179	5,357	3.44	54	9.69	15.5	9.69
Milford	344,592	331,776	-3.72	3,756	3,915	4.23	128	11.80	15.5	11.80
Milbury	287,884	271,056	-5.85	3,006	3,093	2.89	220	11.41	15.5	11.41
Millis	380,804	394,325	3.55	4,733	4,842	2.30	71	12.28	15.5	12.28
Millville	312,234	317,573	1.71	3,285	3,366	2.47	180	10.60	15.5	10.60
Milton	544,895	549,314	0.81	5,907	6,015	1.83	44	10.95	15.5	10.95
Monroe	88,273	92,010	4.23	1,086	1,283	18.14	329	13.94	15.5	13.94
Monson	222,099	237,009	6.71	2,590	2,825	9.07	250	11.92	15.5	11.92
Montague	197,655	193,185	-1.41	2,524	2,618	3.72	270	13.55	15.5	13.55
Montpelier	451,372	485,952	7.66	4,247	4,718	11.08	294	15.10	15.5	15.10
Montgomery	249,836	250,194	0.14	2,903	3,130	7.82	214	12.51	15.5	12.51
Mt. Washington	355,155	360,892	1.62	1,822	1,992	9.33	317	5.92	15.5	5.92
Nahant	617,949	633,386	2.50	4,394	5,276	20.07	58	8.33	15.5	8.33
Nantucket*	493,410	482,407	-2.23	4,727	4,829	2.16	73	10.01	15.5	10.01
Natick	682,019	686,972	0.73	6,377	6,664	4.50	35	9.70	15.5	9.70
Needham	186,858	185,772	-0.58	1,443	1,401	-2.91	328	7.54	15.5	7.54
New Ashford	247,510	246,211	-0.52	2,552	2,598	1.80	277	10.55	15.5	10.55
New Bedford	272,655	270,900	-0.64	3,258	3,397	4.27	178	12.54	15.5	12.54
New Braintree	471,922	465,765	-1.31	4,374	4,321	-1.20	275	12.61	15.5	12.61
New Marlborough	222,409	221,634	-0.35	2,696	2,795	3.67	251	12.61	15.5	12.61
New Salem	495,516	482,636	-2.60	4,078	4,136	1.42	113	8.57	15.5	8.57
Newbury	488,111	486,986	-0.23	4,925	4,933	0.16	69	10.13	15.5	10.13
Newburyport	818,978	800,744	-2.23	7,641	7,767	1.65	19	9.70	15.5	9.70
Newton	471,922	465,765	-1.31	4,374	4,321	-1.20	275	12.61	15.5	12.61
Norfolk	310,592	314,626	1.30	1,453	1,633	12.39	325	11.32	15.5	11.32
N. Adams	536,831	514,298	-4.14	5,610	5,867	4.58	46	11.40	15.5	11.40
N. Andover	390,708	375,585	-3.87	3,290	3,407	3.56	174	9.07	15.5	9.07
N. Attleborough	247,293	249,648	0.95	2,310	2,482	7.45	293	9.94	15.5	9.94
N. Brookfield	512,389	504,585	-1.52	5,544	5,803	4.67	48	11.50	15.5	11.50
N. Reading	303,049	304,744	0.56	3,300	3,413	3.42	173	11.20	15.5	11.20
Northampton	432,226	418,409	-3.20	3,555	3,556	0.03	50	13.28	15.5	13.28
Northborough	322,221	328,249	1.87	2,752	2,846	3.42	248	8.67	15.5	8.67
Northbridge	194,031	210,300	8.38	2,503	2,782	11.15	253	13.23	15.5	13.23
Northfield	352,070	353,787	0.49	3,422	3,531	3.19	164	9.98	15.5	9.98
Norton	622,473	612,661	-1.58	6,654	6,782	1.92	33	11.07	15.5	11.07
Norwell	283,117	287,615	1.59	1,710	1,783	4.27	323	6.20	15.5	6.20
Norwood	643,984	651,362	1.15	3,600	3,667	1.86	148	5.63	15.5	5.63
Oak Bluffs	276,714	285,790	3.28	2,324	2,526	8.69	286	8.84	15.5	8.84
Oakham	151,030	177,738	17.68	2,136	2,243	5.01	308	12.62	15.5	12.62
Orange	775,199	785,411	1.32	3,310	3,550	7.25	160	4.52	15.5	4.52
Orleans	283,117	287,615	1.59	1,710	1,783	4.27	323	6.20	15.5	6.20
Otis	254,131	261,243	2.80	2,694	2,714	0.74	257	10.39	15.5	10.39
Oxford	197,498	205,098	3.85	2,595	2,691	3.70	264	13.12	15.5	13.12
Palmer	347,213	348,687	0.42	3,965	4,156	4.82	111	9.92	15.5	9.92
Paxton	389,654	351,845	-9.70	3,024	3,050	0.86	226	8.67	15.5	8.67
Peabody	282,025	301,230	6.81	5,178	5,232	1.04	59	17.37	15.5	17.37
Pelham	392,770	380,256	-3.19	4,089	4,156	1.64	112	10.93	15.5	10.93
Pembroke	197,498	205,098	3.85	2,595	2,691	3.70	264	13.12	15.5	13.12
Pepperell	147,183	182,456	23.97	2,490	2,567	3.09	284	14.07	15.5	14.07
Peru	279,110	270,756	-2.99	2,850	3,100	8.77	218	11.45	15.5	11.45
Petersham	331,788	325,064	-2.00	1,949	2,554	31.04	285	11.35	15.5	11.35
Phillipsburg	167,121	189,128	13.17	2,381	2,487	4.45	292	13.15	15.5	13.15
Pittsfield	199,794	190,405	-4.70	2,433	2,660	9.33	269	13.97	15.5	13.97
Plainfield	384,104	384,290	0.05	4,118	4,127	0.22	111	10.74	15.5	10.74
Plainville	384,285	350,540	-8.50	3,479	3,621	4.08	153	10.33	15.5	10.33
Plymouth	384,867	406,725	5.68	4,645	4,828	3.94	74	11.87	15.5	11.87
Plympton										
Princeton	373,441	375,830	0.64	4,399	4,720	7.30	81	12.56	15.5	12.56
Provincetown	857,570	865,577	0.93	4,254	4,432	4.18	94	5.12	15.5	5.12
Quincy	362,087	355,112	-1.93	3,780	3,846	1.75	137	10.83	15.5	10.83
Randolph	334,883	328,652	-1.86	3,088	3,148	1.94	209	9.58	15.5	9.58
Raynham	397,108	377,448	-4.95	3,645	3,880	6.45	132	10.28	15.5	10.28
Reading	461,656	455,066	-2.08	5,572	5,696	2.23	49	12.60	15.5	12.60
Rehoboth	434,685	427,984	-1.52	3,273	3,431	4.83	170	8.03	15.5	8.03
Revere	314,579	329,025	4.59	3,187	3,333	4.58	182	10.13	15.5	10.13
Richmond	450,206			3,503					15.5	
Rochester	392,408	394,992	0.66	3,516	3,567	1.45	158	9.03	15.5	9.03
Rockland	329,982	310,448	-5.92	3,227	3,260	1.02	190	10.50	15.5	10.50
Rockport	550,415	539,417	-2.00	4,431	4,526	2.14	92	8.39	15.5	8.39
Roslindale	189,871	195,061	2.73	780	882	13.08	332	4.52	15.5	4.52
Roxbury	427,306	426,325	-0.23	4,179	4,425	5.89	95	10.38	15.5	10.38
Royalston	209,331	213,547	2.01	1,815	1,830	0.83	322	8.57	15.5	8.57
Russell	196,631	197,946	0.67	2,792	3,234	15.83	194	16.34	15.5	16.34
Rutland	286,162	289,374	1.12	3,079	3,244	5.36	191	11.21	15.5	11.21
Salem	355,319	347,426	-2.22	3,827	4,054	5.93	121	11.67	15.5	11.67
Salisbury	360,359	355,174	-1.44	2,948	3,005	1.93	234	8.46	15.5	8.46
Sandwich	269,839	271,273	0.53	2,137	2,238	4.73	309	8.25	15.5	8.25
Saugus	428,623	426,738	-0.44	3,986	4,101	2.89	117	9.61	15.5	9.61
Saugus	389,674	381,251	-1.65	3,227	3,357	4.03	181	8.76	15.5	8.76
Savoy	173,436	171,400	-1.17	1,868	1,947	4.23	320	11.36	15.5	11.36
Scituate	543,917	543,244	-0.12	4,520	5,009	10.82	65	9.22	15.5	9.22
Seekonk	360,426	360,611	0.05	3,215	3,238	0.72	193	8.98	15.5	8.98
Sharon	496,118	454,209	-8.45	7,025	7,626	8.56	23	16.79	15.5	16.79
Shelburne	290,886	294,331	1.08	3,336	3,452	3.48	169	11.74	15.5	11.74
Shelburne	232,490	238,446	2.70	2,797	2,863	2.36	244	12.11	15.5	12.11
Sherborn	787,999	770,925	-2.17	11,723	12,073	2.90	2	15.66	15.5	15.66
Shirley	328,228	324,217	-1.22	3,167	3,291	3.92	187	10.15	15.5	10.15
Shrewsbury	415,501	400,008	-3.73	3,598	3,656	1.61	149	9.14	15.5	9.14
Shutesbury	225,343	261,474	16.03	4,013	4,157	3.59	110	15.90	15.5	15.90
Somerset*										
Somerville*										
S. Hadley	250,133	251,878	0.70	2,964	3,088	4.18	221	12.26	15.5	12.26
Southampton	268,663	270,339	0.62	3,157	3,176	0.60	201	11.75	15.5	11.75
Southborough	579,431	578,642	-0.48	7,289	7,231	-0.80	27	12.54	15.5	12.54
Southbridge	216,993	212,995	-1.84	2,482	2,515	1.34	290	11.81	15.5	11.81
Southwick	254,744	256,933	0.86	3,016	3,135	3.95	212	12.20	15.5	12.20
Spencer	259,847	261,991	0.83	2,009	2,075	3.29	314	7.92	15.5	7.92
Springfield	146,319	151,541	3.57	2,347	2,429	3.49	299	16.03	15.5	16.03
Sterling	357,130	341,378	-4.41	4,111	4,312	4.89	99	12.63	15.5	12.63
Stockbridge	488,911	520,727	6.51	3,349	3,603	7.58	154	6.92	15.5	6.92
Stoneham	431,042	421,414	-2.23	4,198	4,294	2.29	101	10.19	15.5	10.19
Stoughton	355,602	361,133	1.56	3,449	3,535	2.49	163	9.79	15.5	9.79
Stow	483,765	471,013	-2.64	6,686	6,938	3.77	30	14.73	15.5	14.73
Sturbridge	307,968	313,565	1.82	3,369	3,550	5.37	161	11.32	15.5	11.32
Sudbury	702,816	683,843	-2.70	9,221	9,758	5.82	8	14.27	15.5	14.27
Sunderland	281,539	287,909	2.10	3,477	3,472	-0.14	167	12.06	15.5	12.06
Sutton	365,460	345,687	-5.41	3,560	3,889	9.24	131	11.25	15.5	11.25
Swampscott	537,900	535,037	-0.53	6,917	7,293	5.44	26	13.63	15.5	13.63
Swansea	311,726	314,576	0.91	2,456	2,598	5.78	278			

## Fiscal 2008 Average Single-Family Tax Bills and Assessed Values continued from page 4

Massachusetts. Up until recently, this was because the value of residential properties was escalating each year far more dramatically than commercial, industrial and personal property (CIP) values. The total assessed value of all CIP increased 86.6 percent between FY1999 and FY2008, but still did not keep pace with the 159.7 percent increase in total assessed value of all residential property classes. As a result of this difference in the rate of appreciation, the residential class is bearing a significantly larger share of the statewide property tax; increasing from 67.85 percent in FY99 to 73.3 percent in FY08.

### Community Trends

#### High values and high bills; (comparatively) low values and (comparatively) low bills

The six communities with the highest tax bills in FY2007 retained their rankings in FY2008. Each of these six has average bills that exceed \$10,000. As recently as FY2002, no town had an average bill over this mark, but in 2003 Weston became the first when their average bill became \$10,783. **Weston** (FY2008: \$14,537) continues to have the highest average tax bill, followed by: **Sherborn** (\$12,073), **Lincoln** (\$10,870), **Dover** (\$10,860), **Carlisle** (\$10,610), and **Concord** (\$10,125).

Not unexpectedly, these six towns also all ranked among the highest with respect to average assessed value. Their rankings by assessed values are **Weston** (2), **Sherborn** (18), **Lincoln** (7), **Dover** (6), **Carlisle** (13) and **Concord** (10).

The five communities with the lowest average tax bills also remained the same: **Hancock** (\$693), **Rowe** (\$882), **Florida** (\$1,104), **Erving** (\$1,235) and **Monroe** (\$1,283). These five towns are all in the lower 20 percent of average assessed residential values and, it is noteworthy to point out that, with the exception of Hancock, each has a major taxpayer such as a power plant allowing them to split the tax rate and shift the tax burden away from the single-

family homeowner. Hancock has had multiple commercial and residential condo developments which have shifted the burden away from single-family parcels in their community.

Similar to past results, statewide the association between the average tax bill and average assessed value is generally strong with only a few exceptions. Key exceptions are communities on the Cape and Islands, which tend to have high assessed values but lower tax bills due to the large number of seasonal properties and a lower demand for services. While the Berkshires are also known for second homes and vacationers, the majority of communities in Berkshire County (20 of 25) have low values and low bills. Only five communities in Berkshire County have higher than average assessed values, but these communities continue to have low bills.

#### Largest Tax Bill Increases: Overrides, debt exclusions, and taxing to the levy capacity

In FY2008, six communities experienced increases in their average tax bills that were greater than 15 percent; these increases ranged from 15.8 percent to 31.0 percent. Although three of the six communities' increases occurred due to overrides or debt exclusions, the other three communities' increases were due to decisions to tax to their levy capacity, which they had not previously done.

In **Phillipston**, the 31 percent increase in tax bills resulted from successful Proposition 2½ overrides totaling almost \$485,000 in increased levy capacity.

**East Brookfield** (+23 percent) and **Nahant** (+20 percent) each had substantial new debt exclusion votes take effect.

In the case of **Granville** (+19.9 percent), **Monroe** (+18.1 percent) and **Russell** (+15.8 percent) the large rate of increase was due to the use of most of their remaining substantial excess levy capacity.

### Property Values

Of the 333 communities evaluated, 144 dropped in value from FY2007 to FY2008. Seventeen communities lost 5 percent or more in value, with **Peabody's** values slipping the most at -9.7 percent.

On the flip side, in this category, six towns gained over 20 percent in value and a total of 41 municipalities gained more than five percent in value (this includes those six over 20 percent). **Aquinnah** (+30 percent) had the largest increase of any municipality statewide in FY2008. **Tyringham**, **Alford**, **Peru**, **Hawley** and **Gill** were the only other towns experiencing jumps of above 20 percent, while all other communities had lower percentage growth or losses. It is interesting to note, of the 41 municipalities that gained more than five percent in value all but five (or 36 of the 41) are located west of Worcester County in western Massachusetts. Aquinnah and two other Martha's Vineyard communities, **Edgartown** and **West Tisbury**, were the only three in the top 25 of those with rising values that are found east of the Quabbin Reservoir.

Just a short time ago values were spiking across the state, especially in the eastern counties. Three years ago, this story was the inverse: 102 communities had increases in their values of more than 20 percent. This decline might suggest that values are cooling off sooner in the eastern part. This is also evidenced by the fact that all but nine (or 135) of those 144 municipalities losing value are in or east of Worcester County. This is further evidence that, even with the time lag inherent with the assessment process the slowdown in the real estate market is now translating into the valuations.

### Recertification's Role

Additional analysis of the average assessed single-family property values show a correlation to DLS' community recertification schedule. The majority

continued on page 8



**Fiscal 2008 Average Single-Family Tax Bills and Assessed Values** continued from page 7

FY1999–FY2008 State Total Average Single-Family Tax Bill									
Fiscal year	Avg. assessed value	Pct. change	Actual dollars	Pct. change	– Single-family tax bill –		Adjusted by IPD*	Pct. change	Tax rate
					Adjusted by CPI	Pct. change			
1999	173,576	5.2	2,557	3.8	2,557	1.7	2,557	1.6	14.73
2000	185,009	6.6	2,679	4.8	2,587	1.2	2,574	0.7	14.48
2001	206,789	11.8	2,826	5.5	2,609	0.8	2,614	1.6	13.67
2002	236,229	14.2	3,015	6.7	2,701	3.5	2,727	4.3	12.76
2003	266,350	12.8	3,206	6.3	2,776	2.8	2,804	2.8	12.04
2004	307,361	15.4	3,412	6.4	2,855	2.8	2,884	2.8	11.10
2005	352,820	14.8	3,588	5.2	2,935	2.8	2,863	–0.7	10.17
2006	385,502	9.3	3,801	5.9	2,991	1.9	2,849	–0.4	9.86
2007	406,673	5.5	3,962	4.2	3,051	2.0	2,830	–0.7	9.74
2008	403,731	–0.7	4,111	3.8	3,083	1.1	2,795	–1.2	10.00
<b>Change</b>	<b>230,155</b>		<b>1,554</b>		<b>526</b>		<b>238</b>		<b>–4.73</b>
<b>Pct. change</b>	<b>132.6</b>		<b>60.8</b>		<b>20.6</b>		<b>9.3</b>		<b>–32.1</b>

\*Implicit price deflator for state and local government services. The FY2008 IPD calculation is based on the past three available quarters.

**Table 2**

(13) of the 18 communities with value increases over 10 percent just completed a triennial recertification in 2008. On the opposite side, only two of 17 municipalities with a drop of 5 percent or more were in a revaluation year. These figures show that the largest changes are still occurring in certification years, despite the recent push for interim year adjustments. All of the 13 communities with value increases in FY2008 are located in Western Massachusetts, where interim adjustments are not being done as regularly.

**Looking ahead ...**

The current year data for FY2008 shows what may be the beginning of a troubling trend in which average single-family tax bills and assessed values in the commonwealth go in separate directions. In FY2008 average tax bills increased slightly from FY2007 while the average single-family property value decreased for the first time in a decade. This trend is likely to continue into

the near future as reports show property values continuing to decline, while conversely there remain many uncontrollable pressures increasing the cost of delivering government services.

Stay tuned for next month's focus article which looks at the impact of successful Proposition 2½ overrides on communities' levies over this same time period of FY1999 to FY2008. ■

**Databank Highlight**

**Jared Curtis, Analyst,  
Local Aid/Databank**

By visiting our website at [www.mass.gov/dls](http://www.mass.gov/dls) you can find an assortment of financial data on individual communities.

You can request additional data on the average single family tax bill or other property tax related files by contacting the Municipal Databank at [databank@dor.state.ma.us](mailto:databank@dor.state.ma.us) or 617-626-2384. ■

**Legal** continued from page 3

In our view, the Northfield decision on the water rights might be compared to a right of way which a homeowner might have over an abutter's land. The right of way increases the homeowner's property value since it permits access and development of the land, but the right of way itself is not separately assessed.

For a related article entitled "Lease of Public Property," please consult page two of the [June/July 1998 issue of City & Town](#) which is available on our website. The article discusses the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court decision of *Sisk v. Assessors of Essex*, 426 Mass. 651 (1998) upholding the taxation of summer cottages on land leased by a municipality under long-term leases. In *Sisk*, the taxes were assessed on the entire value of the estate without taking into consideration the lease provisions limiting occupancy to the months of April to October. This article is especially relevant since the ATB cited *Sisk* in the *Smith* decision discussed above. ■



## DLS Gateway Expands continued from page 1

In April, one person in most municipalities received an e-mail informing them that they are their community's designated local account administrator. That person, along with the city/town clerk, can add or update persons in the Local Officials Directory, set up new accounts, and assign permissions to read, save or submit information. Setting up a new account involves assigning an initial password. Ordinarily, password maintenance is the most time-consuming part of an account administrator's role, as users forget or mislay infrequently used passwords. To avoid this administrative burden, the system now has a "Forgot Password" feature on the main page. Users can get a temporary password e-mailed to them at any time and can then enter in their own preferred password.

Since the pilot testing phase, DLS Gateway has added a number of enhancements and one new module:

- The new module is District Tax Rate, in which district officials and authorized officials in associated municipalities can submit all required forms to set a district tax rate;
- In city/town Tax Rate, a Classification Options Table has been added so assessors can try "what if" scenarios involved in different percentage shifts among tax classes;
- Also in city/town Tax Rate, the LA-5 Options page includes data entry fields to document the notices and results of classification hearings so that local officials can complete all sections of the form online;
- In Miscellaneous Forms, the CP2 that reports community preservation fund balances has been revised and simplified;

- In Schedule A, the report menu now includes the KAR-1;

- "Forgot Username" and "Forgot Password" self help features along with "My Profile" page to store password hints and answers.

Behind the scenes, an enhancement can send out automatic notifications to officials in selected municipal departments at the completion of any step in any process in any module. The system looks for an e-mail address in the Local Officials Directory for any official in the selected department and notifies them that, for example, the tax rate has been set or preliminary revaluation certification has been approved. This capability will be used sparingly, so as not to fill local inboxes with unwanted notifications. However, for those steps in various regulatory processes where timely notification is very important to certain local officials, this enhancement will immediately tell the right people what they need to know without phone tag or postal service delays. It also augments the "human factor" of DLS by reminding employees to write or call and local officials to log in and check on DLS Gateway.

The department's DLS Gateway investment is based on society's increasing reliance on the Internet for exchange of information and delivery of services. Not all towns and not all municipal officials are prepared to make full use of the Internet at this time. DLS will continue to support older technologies, e.g. Excel-based Auto Recap and Schedule A programs, until reliable broadband services are available in all communities. Municipalities who decline to connect key financial and executive officials, despite being in areas served by broadband providers, should be aware

of the state's strategic direction in moving state-local communications towards online processes. Ultimately, the Internet is a faster, more responsive, and less expensive way of doing business.

What is included DLS Gateway now?

For municipal officials:

- City/town tax rate setting and applicable assessment certification forms;
- Schedule A summaries of revenues and expenditures;
- LA-3 Real Estate Sales Reporting for Certification and EQV;
- Miscellaneous accounting forms: Community Preservation Act CP1 and CP2; Snow & Ice Report; Cash Reconciliation; Statement of Indebtedness; Outstanding Receivables; Quarterly Cash Report; Balance Sheet Checklist;
- Local Officials Directory with local election reporting;
- Security for local account administrators to manage user identities and permissions.

For all Internet users:

- Direct access to the Municipal Databank database through report writer allowing for user defined parameters. This custom report writer is available on the DLS website under [Databank Reports](#).

For more information about Gateway, please see our [website](#). ■

**Please remember to update the online [Local Officials Directory](#) so that both municipal and state officials have accurate contact information.**

## The 411 on 311 continued from page 2

ment. The system also interfaces with the city's financial software system for real-time cost and accounting data. Another important benefit is that 311 significantly reduces the number of non-emergency 911 calls, freeing up public safety dispatchers for critical calls. It is important to note that 311 is not just an answering service, but a valuable management tool that provides detailed data to ensure that accurate and consistent services are delivered. For many years Springfield had a call center for Department of Public Works related information. However, there continued to be a growing need to provide similar kinds of services for all city departments. That's where 311 comes in.

How does 311 actually work? When residents dial 311, they will be connected to a call center technician who can provide or access any non-emergency information regarding city services, departments, programs or activities. The call center technicians are specifically trained to get the information citizens want and if it is not available, find out how to get it within a certain turnaround time. The 311 software package provides technicians with a comprehensive database of information about the city and its operations that have been created by, and tailored to, each department. A service request is then generated with pertinent information and then assigned a tracking number so that it can be followed once it goes to a department for response. Citizens are provided with the tracking number and they can follow the status of their request via the city's website.

The 311 program is not a switchboard or Centrex system. It's a direct service department that is empowered to resolve problems and provide answers, most of which will be completed with one telephone call. The system enables departments to prioritize work and receive feedback on customer needs. Direct citizen input will help de-

termine the appropriate allocation of resources over time. The system also provides information to managers regarding performance management, problems or issues unique to neighborhoods or identifying capital or infrastructure needs. In addition, departmental staff are freed up from answering routine calls or making continual transfers, allowing them to focus on the core functions of their offices. The city has estimated that over time, 17 positions can be reduced by centralizing calls. The overall investment in 311 depends on the size of the organization, type of software and telephone systems selected (some are on the state bid list), and number of call center staff. Because Springfield already had a call center at DPW, that staff was absorbed into 311 and a 311 call cen-

ter director was hired. One-time costs of \$90,000 and annual operating costs of \$270,000 are projected. However, some communities have implemented 311 for initial costs around \$57,000.

Timely and effective customer service delivery is a priority for most public organizations and 311 is an opportunity for local governments to demonstrate their capability and competency to citizens. The 311 system can give residents a positive first impression of their municipal government, which they recognize as being funded by their tax dollars.

For information please contact Patricia A. Vinchesi, deputy director, Springfield Finance Control Board, at [vinchesip@dor.state.ma.us](mailto:vinchesip@dor.state.ma.us) or 413-784-1582. ■



City and Town welcomes the submission of municipal Best Practice articles and ideas. To do so please contact us at: [cityandtown@dor.state.ma.us](mailto:cityandtown@dor.state.ma.us) or by calling 617-626-2377.

### Mark Your Calendars

**Assessment Administration: Law, Procedures and Valuations (Course 101)** will be held on August 4 through August 8 at the University of Massachusetts **Amherst**. Information regarding this session is available on the Massachusetts Association of Assessing Officers website: [www.maaao.org](http://www.maaao.org).

The **Fall 2008 Course 101** will be offered at **Barnstable** High School on Tuesdays evenings on October 7, 14, 21, 28 and November 4 and 18. Please note no class will be held on November 11 in observance of Veteran's Day. A Bulletin will be issued in September regarding this training opportunity.

**"What's New in Municipal Law"** will be held on Friday September 26, 2008, at the Log Cabin Banquet and Meeting House in **Holyoke** and Friday, October 3, 2008, at the Lantana in **Randolph**. The Bulletin with detailed information this seminar will be issued in late July.

If you have any questions regarding the above information, please contact Donna Quinn, training coordinator, at 617-626-3838 or [quinnd@dor.state.ma.us](mailto:quinnd@dor.state.ma.us). ■

## DLS Profile

## Pam Kocher Joins the Administration

**S.J. Port, Director of Policy and Communication**



**Pam Kocher**

After eight years as the Massachusetts Municipal Association's (MMA) senior research analyst, Pam Kocher joins the Patrick–Murray Administration as the Executive Office of Administration and Finance's (ANF) new director of local policy and deputy chief of staff.

At MMA, Pam's work on local government initiatives included research and analysis on legislation proposed by the current administration, specifically provisions of the 2007 Municipal Partnership Act. In her role she had the opportunity to participate in the Municipal Finance Task Force subcommittee, which drew upon local officials, public policy organizations, private sector, and academia experts to develop a new needs-based formula for distributing unrestricted state aid.

While at the MMA, Kocher says she "utilized DLS resources on a daily basis, not only for [her] own needs as MMA's research analyst but also directing local officials to DLS resources." This proved good practice for her new position, in which, she serves as the primary liaison between ANF and the Division of Local Services (DLS).

Within ANF, Kocher is responsible for understanding and analyzing issues of importance to municipal leaders, the administration and DLS. Similar to the role she played at MMA, Kocher spends her days engaging with local officials, state agencies and public policy organizations. However since her arrival in June, Kocher's perspective has shifted from that of somebody outside the State House to that of an individual at the core of the state's municipal partnership, reporting directly to the secretary of ANF and working closely with the Offices of the Governor and Lt. Governor.

"I am impressed with the energy and resources this administration, and ANF in particular, commit to engaging with individual communities to resolve community-specific issues," says Kocher. "There is a local component to most issues. Even if an issue is not initially local policy specific, everything that occurs in the state occurs in a city or town and thus impacts our municipalities."

For ANF Secretary Leslie Kirwan, who began her career in DLS, the position is of enormous value. "The role of local policy director both affirms the administration's commitment to cities and towns and assures ANF has its finger on the pulse of local government."

Kocher's own interest in municipalities grew out of work as a researcher at Boston University's School of Public Health.

Following her graduation from Connecticut College with a degree in urban studies, Kocher earned a masters of public health in environmental health and epidemiology from Boston University.

"During my time as a researcher at Boston University's School of Public Health, I most enjoyed my work on community-focused projects but least enjoyed the multi-year research cycle involved in bringing large grant-funded studies from initiation to policy implementation," says Kocher. "Working with local governments allows me to continue to work with communities and turn research into advocacy and policy much more quickly."

***"There is a local component to most issues. Even if an issue is not initially local policy specific, everything that occurs in the state occurs in a city or town and thus impacts our municipalities."***

Thrown into State House life in the middle of a busy summer, at the close of a two year-legislative session, Kocher finds time management skills to be essential.

"Being able to stay organized and prioritize in a fast-paced environment where everything is a priority is imperative," says Kocher, who also relies heavily on "interpersonal skills and collaboration."

Staying organized, she finds that her days, "involve a nice combination of collaboration with others and working independently."

On the ice, Kocher makes use of a different skill set, playing defense for local women's ice hockey leagues. Having taken up ice hockey in 1990, she is a "huge proponent of women taking part in and enjoying the game!"

Over the course of her career in municipal policy, Kocher plans to visit all 351 cities and towns. Although she and her husband, Jay, currently reside in **Quincy**, Kocher has called **Marion, Cambridge, Wellesley** and **Brookline** home over the years.

DLS welcomes our colleague onboard and looks forward to working with her in this role. ■

## Municipal Fiscal Calendar

### August 31

**Taxpayer: Last Filing Day for Classified Forest Land, M.G.L. Ch. 61.**

**DOR/BOA: Issue Instructions for Determining Local and District Tax Rates.** A copy of the Tax Rate Recap Sheet and its instructions are forwarded to the town.

**Assessors: Begin Work on Tax Rate Recapitulation Sheet (to set tax rate for semi-annual bills).** Until the Tax Rate Recap Sheet is completed and certified by the Commissioner of Revenue, the community may not set a tax rate nor send out its property tax bills (unless it issues preliminary quarterly tax bills or requests from DOR the authority to send out preliminary tax notices if DOR requirements are met). Communities should begin gathering the information in enough time for the tax rate to be set and tax bills mailed by October 1. The Tax Rate Recap Sheet provides Mayors or Selectmen with a ready-made financial management tool because the town's most important financial management information is summarized on this form. The Mayor or Selectmen should review the Recap Sheet in preliminary form in order to understand the following financial information:

**Page 1 (Tax Rate Summary).** The proposed tax levy should be compared to the levy limit. If a town does not levy to its limit, the remaining levy is referred to as excess levy capacity. Excess levy capacity is lost to the community for the current fiscal year although it will always remain in the levy limit calculation.

**Page 2 (Amount To Be Raised).** This section includes appropriations and other local expenditures not appropriated. These include overlay deficits, revenue deficits, state and county charges, Cherry Sheet offset items, and the allowance for abatements and exemptions. By comparing this information to the prior year(s), any significant changes can be determined.

**Page 2 (Estimated Receipts and Revenues from Other Sources).** In particular, Section C shows the amount appropriated from free cash and other available funds. By comparing the amounts appropriated to the balances in these accounts (available from the Accountant/Auditor), the Mayor or Selectmen can get a sense of how their nonproperty tax revenues are being used.

**Page 3, Schedule A (Local Receipts Not Allocated).** By comparing these figures to prior year(s), the Mayor or Selectmen can determine any changes in these revenues.

**Page 4, Schedule B (Certification of Appropriations and Source of Funding).** This section includes financial votes of City/Town Council or Town Meeting not previously reported on last year's recap.

### September 15

**Accountant/Assessors: Jointly Submit Community Preservation Surcharge Report.** This report (CP-1) is a statement of the prior year's net Community Preservation Surcharge levy, and is used to distribute state matching funds on October 15.

### September 30

**Municipal and District Treasurer/Collector: Compensating Balance Report.** If compensating balance accounts were maintained during the prior fiscal year, a report and account analysis schedules are required.

**Accountant/Superintendent/School Committee: Jointly Submit End of Year Report to the DOE.** Schedule 1: determines compliance with prior year Net School Spending requirement. Schedule 19: determines compliance with current year Net School Spending requirement.

**Accountant: Submit Snow and Ice Report.** This report is a statement of snow and ice expenditures and financing sources.

**Treasurer: 4th Quarter Reconciliation of Cash for the Previous Fiscal Year (due 45 days after end of quarter or upon submission of a balance sheet for free cash/excess and deficiency certification, whichever is earlier).** A reconciliation is the process of comparing the Treasurer's accounts to the Accountant's/Auditor's or Schools Business Manager's ledger balance to determine if they are consistent, and for the officials to make any necessary corrections. When the reconciliation is complete, the Accountant/Auditor/School Business Manager should indicate agreement with the Treasurer's balances. Reconciliations are required every quarter by DOR, but communities and school districts should reconcile monthly for their own purposes. The fourth quarterly report as of June 30 must

be completed and returned to DOR. The first three quarterly reports of the fiscal year should be completed timely and filed in both the Treasurer's and Accountant's/Auditor's or School Business Manager's offices for possible BOA inspection or audit. Municipalities and school districts may also use these reports to monitor cash practices of the Treasurer's office. If the Accountant/Auditor/School Business Manager and Treasurer are not consistently reconciling cash accounts, or if the reconciliations indicate variances, the Mayor, Selectmen or School Committee should inquire as to the reasons.

**Treasurer: Statement of Indebtedness.** Massachusetts General Laws Ch. 44, Sec. 28 requires the Director of Accounts to maintain complete and accurate records of indebtedness by cities, towns and districts. This statute also requires Treasurers to furnish any other information requested by the Director in respect to the authorization and issuance of loans. This Statement is the annual report required from Treasurers to accomplish this purpose. Treasurers should reconcile their debt records with the Accountant/Auditor before filing the Statement of Indebtedness to ensure that the Statement and balance sheet are in agreement.

**State Treasurer: Notification of Quarterly Local Aid Payments on or Before September 30.** When local aid payments are transmitted to communities, the cover letter indicates what funds (e.g., Ch. 70, Lottery) will be made available, less quarterly assessments (see Cherry Sheet attachment for details). ■



#### City & Town

City & Town is published by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue's Division of Local Services (DLS) and is designed to address matters of interest to local officials.

**S.J. Port**, Editor

**Marilyn Browne**, Editor Emeritus

Editorial Board:

**Robert Nunes, Robert Bliss, Zachary Blake and Amy Januskiewicz**

To obtain information or publications, contact the Division of Local Services via:

- website: [www.mass.gov/dls](http://www.mass.gov/dls)
- e-mail: [cityandtown@dor.state.ma.us](mailto:cityandtown@dor.state.ma.us)
- telephone: 617-626-2377
- mail: PO Box 9569, Boston, MA 02114-9569